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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0673
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1980
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 9016
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7254
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5178
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3401
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5133
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0007
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0668
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4244
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9579
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 6874
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 1339
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3791
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000982

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: TAMIL LEADER URGES U.S., INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY
TO PRESS GSL ON HUMAN RIGHTS

REF: COLOMBO 979

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR PATRICIA A. BUTENIS. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: In an initial courtesy call, Tamil National Alliance (TNA) leader R. Sampanthan discussed a range of issues with the Ambassador, including upcoming elections, human rights, and the role of Tamils in the post-war environment. Sampanthan opined that the presidential election would be held after the April parliamentary elections. He urged the U.S. to push the government for accountability on human rights violations. Sampanthan passed to Ambassador copies of January 2009 letters to President Obama and Secretary Clinton, the texts of which post has sent. (REFTEL) END SUMMARY.

GSL Less Confident About Upcoming Elections

12. (C) On October 19, TNA leader R. Sampanthan paid an initial call on Ambassador and discussed a wide range of topics. Sampanthan offered that there seemed to be a contract between Chief of Defense Staff Sarath Fonseka and the opposition alliance, but stopped short of saying whether he thought Fonseka would contest in the elections. Sampanthan allowed that the relationship between Fonseka and the government was fractured and said Fonseka was probably one of the few candidates who could give President Mahinda Rajapaksa a run for his money. He credited Fonseka with the tactical decisions related to the war, while Gotabaya Rajapaksa served as a conduit to the President. He thought it was unwise of the government to try to hurt Fonseka, a widely-perceived war hero, so soon after the end of the conflict. (NOTE: Sampanthan's guarded comments about Fonseka's potential presidential candidacy probably reflect his personal distaste for both Rajapaksa and Fonseka, the architect and executor of the war victory. END NOTE.)

13. (C) Sampanthan said he thought the government might wait

to hold a presidential election until after parliamentary elections, because the idea of facing Fonseka as an opponent made the government rethink its original strategy of capitalizing on its victory over the LTTE by holding early presidential elections. He confirmed that the TNA probably would not field a candidate in the presidential elections.

GSL Accountability and the S/WCI Report

14. (C) The Ambassador mentioned the soon-to-be-released report on incidents during the recent conflict and her hope that the government would respond to the report by putting a mechanism for accountability in place. Sampanthan argued that the government would never allow a credible outcome and was unlikely to allow an international inquiry, pointing out the GSL's past attempts to undermine accountability. Sampanthan said the U.S. must use this opportunity to put extreme pressure on the GSL, which would not pursue a political solution otherwise. He said a reconciliation commission, similar to South Africa's post-apartheid commission, would not work in Sri Lanka because of cultural and political differences, and because the government remained in power. Sampanthan said his Tamil constituents believed reconciliation could take place but it needed to be based on a credible stance on human rights and a political settlement that gave them some power. He said that implementing the devolution of power in the 13th amendment would not sufficiently address the concerns of his constituents.

15. (C) The Ambassador outlined the main points of the report on incidents during the conflict and assured Sampanthan that that GSL would need to respond in some way or its

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relationships with the U.S. would continue to suffer. She pointed out that some members of Congress already questioned U.S. participation in the recent TIFA conference. She had suggested to the GSL that its response to the report be measured, rather than immediately rejecting it, which would erode the government's credibility. Sampanthan said that the GSL pointedly had disregarded him and in doing so, lost an opportunity to engage with the Tamil populace. He posited that Rajapaksa was not at ease with himself and that he had a guilty conscience for how the war was conducted. The Ambassador thanked Sampanthan and promised to deliver a copy of the report to him once it was released.

COMMENT

16. (C) Sampanthan's Tamil constituents remain politically, socially, and geographically divided and do not appear to have formulated a new political strategy. His urging the Ambassador to press the government to respond to accusations of human rights violations is predictable and will likely continue. Not surprisingly, the government's reluctance to meaningfully engage with the TNA post-conflict and its snubbing of the TNA leader aggravate ethnic tensions still smarting from the war.

BUTENIS